UNITED NATIONS **S**

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1995/762
31 August 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 29 AUGUST 1995 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I should like to share with you my concern over recent developments in the Great Lakes Region. As you are aware, I visited the region last July where I urged the Government of Rwanda to work towards political stability and return to normalcy in the country. I was particularly struck by the deep scars left by the genocide of April 1994 on the Rwandese society which still remain to be healed. I had also an opportunity to witness the inhuman conditions in Rwandese prisons where 51,000 prisoners were being held in facilities meant for 12,500 prisoners and the paralysis in the Rwandese justice system. Last week, the refoulement of refugees from Zaire added to the already precarious security situation in the region and raised the possibility of yet another humanitarian tragedy.

I have already shared with you correspondence exchanged between His Excellency Mr. Kengo wa Dongo, Prime Minister of the Republic of Zaire, and myself following the refoulement of Rwandese and Burundese refugees from Zaire. I have since received assurances from the Government of Zaire that it will not pursue forcible repatriation of refugees. The High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Sadako Ogata, at my request, is currently undertaking consultations with the Government of Zaire and other countries in the region to ensure the safe, voluntary and orderly repatriation of refugees.

In this context, she will seek to ensure that the countries of the region honour their commitments to the Tripartite Agreements, the Nairobi Summit Declaration as well as the Bujumbura Plan of Action. Mrs. Ogata met with the Prime Minister of Zaire in Geneva today. The Prime Minister wishes the repatriation to be completed by 31 December 1995. The Prime Minister made evident the political and social pressures the refugees were imposing on Zaire. While appreciating the special needs of the host countries, Mrs. Ogata has made it clear that a policy of forcible repatriation will not solve the problem. She will continue her consultations in the region and will report to me next week.

I should, however, add that the enormous economic, environmental and political burden which the presence of almost 2 million refugees places on the Governments and peoples of Zaire, Tanzania and other countries in the region needs to be fully recognized.

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Following my visit and that of Foreign Minister Kinkel of Germany, I asked Under-Secretary-General Peter Hansen to initiate urgent measures to address the crisis arising as a result of prison conditions in Rwanda and the inability of the justice system to process the cases of those incarcerated. A United Nations mission has just returned from Rwanda and has prepared a two-pronged strategy to address this dual but closely related problem. This strategy would, on the one hand, enable immediate action to improve prison conditions including provision of urgently needed humanitarian assistance to the prisoners and also expand the prison capacity by up to 21,000. At the same time, the Government of Rwanda will receive assistance to strengthen its justice system (50 legal experts are being provided to Rwanda urgently), as well as to reinforce its commitment and capacity to implement a proper arrest and detention policy. This includes ensuring the effective functioning of the Commission de Triage intended to screen those arrested through provision of assistance by the Human Rights Field Operations in Rwanda (HRFOR).

In order to implement this strategy in a most expeditious manner, I am entrusting my Special Representative in Rwanda with the overall responsibility for coordination through the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) with special advisory support from the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator. Of course, the successful implementation of this strategy will require the full cooperation and support of the Government of Rwanda as well as the donor community. Extensive consultations are currently being undertaken by Under-Secretary-General Hansen to raise US$ 10 million required. I am encouraged by the initial positive response from several Member States who have offered cash and in-kind contributions. With this support, I am confident that this strategy can be implemented within six to eight weeks.

I have also taken steps to reinforce system-wide coordination structures in Burundi and Rwanda. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs is dispatching two officers to support the Office of my Special Representative in Burundi in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. In Rwanda the Department of Humanitarian Affairs continues to assume responsibility of coordinating humanitarian actions. UNHCR, in collaboration with the Rwandese Ministry of Rehabilitation, takes care of the reception of returning refugees and monitors the situation.

Steps have also been taken to set up a Regional Integrated Information Unit (RIIU) which had been recommended by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee composed of all relevant humanitarian organizations. Based in Nairobi, the RIIU will fill existing gaps in the flow and analysis of information, thereby enhancing the international humanitarian community's capacity to develop and implement integrated approaches to address the problems of the region. With donor support this structure should be established by 1 October 1995.

A lasting solution of the crisis facing the Great Lakes Region lies only in the early restoration of political stability and security in the countries of the region. As you know, I have appointed Ambassador Jesus of Cape Verde as my Special Envoy for the preparation and convening of the Conference on Peace, Security and Development in the Great Lakes Region called for in Security Council resolution 1011 (1995). Ambassador Jesus will be proceeding to the region later this week to consult with all concerned and will report to me on

the outcome of his consultations. Ambassador Jesus will also travel to donor countries and hold talks with multilateral institutions to facilitate longer-term activities in host communities and in areas of return.

As communicated earlier to the Security Council, I have proposed the establishment of the Commission of Enquiry on the supply of arms to the region for which the Terms of Reference and operating modalities were spelt out in my communication. Upon the concurrence of the Security Council, I will dispatch a mission to the area and report to the Council within the proposed three-month period.

Notwithstanding the recent changes in Rwandese Government, I am confident that we will continue our work in a constructive and positive spirit to enhance Rwanda's capacity for ensuring the observance of human rights for all its citizens, the safety of the returnees and justice for all. As you know, the HRFOR is concentrating on confidence-building measures aimed at promoting national reconciliation and a programme of technical assistance and advisory services designed principally for the rehabilitation of the Rwanda justice system. At present, a senior-level mission from the High Commissioner for Human Rights is visiting Rwanda to accelerate support for strengthening these efforts.

I have also been concerned over the slow pace of progress in the establishment of the International Tribunal. Notwithstanding the technical, logistical and other problems, I have asked the Chief Prosecutor, Mr. Goldstone, to do his best to accelerate the work on the International Tribunal. He shall be reaching Rwanda on 30 August and will report to me on the outcome of his visit to the region.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the efforts of many Member States who have intervened with the Governments of the region to support these efforts and have made financial and other contributions.

I should be grateful if you could bring this letter to the attention of the members of the Council.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI